

A CORNER IN LILIES

Entry No. 52 in Our Prize Story Competition

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Sometimes People Stopped and Asked for Some, and She Refused Like a Queen.

AMARYLLIS BEAN, as to her body, dried and active as a grasshopper; as to her face, inconspicuously rose and young, although with keen and at times shrewdly malicious old eyes—was seventy-six years old, and she was on a stephadder out in the yard washing the sitting room windows when she heard the conversation. Her younger sister Amelia and her daughter were talking. The daughter, Louisa, was sewing. She was a schoolteacher, and she was hurrying to finish her dress for the graduating exercises. It was a make-over dress.

Nearly all the garments worn in the family were make-overs. Even John Morrison, Amelia's husband and Louisa's father, was wearing, and would wear as long as he needed garments of the flesh at all, clothes that had belonged to old David Bean. The clothes were much too large for him, and Amelia made efforts, wily but futile, to take them in for John. She, as a rule, took them in too much in some places and not enough in others. John's trousers' knees always bugged, for instance; but he sat down with difficulty, and when seated his deceased brother in law's blue yam socks showed. However, John had a beautiful disposition. He had never complained in his life. He did not know what it meant to "kick against the pricks." He regarded all the pricks of life with an equanimity that almost went to prove him a graduate in moral precepts.

But his wife Amelia and his daughter Louisa were openly rebellious. Amelia scowled when the motormen raved past their old house, which was on a main highway. "Racing past every other second, and raising such a dust! There come two now, racing! I call it wicked!" Amelia scolded mawkishly out of her window at two cars rushing neck and neck in a smother of dust.

Amaryllis turned around and grimaced at the cars like an old monkey. "Dust them things!" she muttered. "It must," remarked Louisa, "be nice to be rich; but I think I might be better employed wishing for a new dress. This dress does look rather shabby."

"Should think it might begin to," asserted Amelia sourly. "This is the fourth time it has been made over." Tears welled up in Louisa's pretty eyes. "You know I do the best I can, Mother," she said reproachfully.

"You know I want a new dress as much as you can possibly want me to have one."

HER mother then turned upon her. "I suppose you want a new dress so as to outshine Maud Kiling, so Frank Vesey will look at you instead of her," said she with a snap.

Louisa's face paled, then flushed. "Mother, you have no right to speak to me so!" said she hotly.

"Ain't I your ma?"

"That does not give you the right to fairly insult me. I am a woman grown."

"So you be—twenty-eight years old. I was married when I was eighteen."

Louisa, with chin up, faced her mother. "It was not my fault that I was not married ten years ago."

"Oh, yes, I dare say you'd like to throw it up against your own flesh and blood that you ain't married, because your pa lost what little he had in that bank failure, and then got discharged from the postoffice because they got a new President of the United States, and you have to keep on schoolteaching, or else let your own folks starve and lose their home. You'd better blame it on the country, that don't know enough to keep a decent President when they've got one, till he gets too old to work, instead of setting him loose, and raising such a rumpus, and spending so much money for a new one that ain't a mite better looking, and making a lot of honest men like your pa lose their places. Go right on blaming me because you ain't married, and because your old bean is casting sheep's eyes at Maud Kiling that's younger than you, and pretty near as good looking, and spends every penny she earns, teaching, on her back! I miss my guess if she don't live to see the time when she'll wish she hadn't!"

"I am not blaming you, Mother," said Louisa quite calmly, although her face was still red with anger, "and you have no right to say that I want a new dress on account of Frank."

"You do!" declared her mother, drawing her thread with a jerk.

"Have it so," said Louisa. "I don't know that it matters." She spoke wearily, rather than angrily, then. She understood her mother very well. She knew that she was full of bitter pain because her daughter had to go shabby, and that blaming the daughter unjustly was her peculiar way of showing her intense affection.

LOUISA sewed on. Her mother continued to talk; but she paid no attention. A breeze came in at the open window, ruffling her pretty hair, a breeze sweet with an unusual flower scent. The house was ancient and shabby; yet, despite that and the two sad figures sewing at the windows, despite the wrathful old woman on the stephadder washing glass and grimacing at fate, in the yard at the south were a few square feet of Paradise. There lived, and grew, and bloomed, Amaryllis Bean's wonderful white lilies.

Amaryllis watched always, with unworthy triumph in the possession of something that others had not, the craning of necks backward toward her patch of lilies. Sometimes people stopped and asked for some, and then Amaryllis cooited. She held her aged head high, and refused like a queen. She never, she said, cut one of her lilies. She would not cut one for the President, not if he were to die and didn't have a flower sent in, which wouldn't be likely. She told how she had obtained the bulbs from a second cousin out West, whose sister in law had married a rich man who went to South America on business and brought home the bulbs; how the cousin, being aware of Amaryllis's fondness for flowers, had sent her some bulbs; how she had planted and tended them, and—lo! the result!

She however had given away some bulbs. Now and then she glanced aside at her lilies, and into the repining old soul came a gleam of something rarer than happiness—the pure delight in beauty. The lilies were beautiful. Close together they stood, in graceful, swaying ranks and files, great sheaves of glorious bloom, and seemed to give out a white light of their own, as well as a solid breath of fragrance like a song. They looked things holy, unapproachable, altogether surprising to come upon in the dusty highway—a company of saints or angels symbolized by flowers.

Amaryllis, washing windows, heard the talk about the dress, and Louisa's marriage, and Frank Vesey, with pain. She was mortified because her beautiful niece must appear next Monday in a make-over dress, seated on the high school platform beside Maud Kiling in a fine new one; but she saw no way out of that difficulty.

THEN she heard the winding scream of a siren whistle down the road, and the usual chug and roar, and scowled. "Another of them devilish things!" she muttered. But as she turned about, and started, she heard

